

**Appropriations Committee**

**Health Subcommittee**

**February 24, 2022**

**Public Hearing on:**

**House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023**

**(Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services)**

Good evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is **Amy Vitale** and I work for CT Renaissance.

Thank you for the opportunity this evening to relay my concerns about the very real condition of one of the most valuable services that our state offers. Mental health and substance use treatment has never been more essential as it is today. We are grateful for the 4% COLA increase from last year's budget. I have been trying to reconcile the continued deficits in our current workforce and ability to adequately compensate them with the current Connecticut state budget and the reserve fund. The reserve fund is bursting at the seams and so are the needs of our communities and non-profit sector. If we cannot support the essential workforce, our treatment sector is in real danger. Residents of Connecticut are in real danger.

At CT Renaissance, the vacancies are such that we are burning out our remaining resources and competing with companies who present a very attractive salary with much less responsibility and training requirements. Many of our staff are running on fumes, are exhausted and are trying to maintain their commitment to our clients because this work means something to them and holds value. Many don't want to leave but are forced to in order to support their families. Finding candidates to provide services from milieu to clinical has proven to be almost impossible with the salaries and competition of other companies. The people who ultimately suffer are our clients who have increased thoughts of suicide, increased substance and destabilized mental health.

I come to work every day because I will not give up on the clients we serve. Working to provide adequate access to high quality mental health and substance use treatment is not taken lightly and is a matter of life and death for many of our clients. In the work I do every day, I keep the motto "everyone knows someone" close to my heart. Everyone on this call tonight knows someone struggling today to keep their head above water, to face each day fighting to provide for their families while trying to manage depression, anxiety or their early recovery. Please do not turn your backs on them. Do not turn your backs on us. Please provide the necessary funding increases to our programs and honor the long-term plan to address the underfunding of community nonprofits and fund services by \$461 million over five years – or an additional 8% in Fiscal Year 2023.

EVERYONE in our state deserves easy access to quality treatment and if we don't receive the funding we need, the State of Connecticut will fail each and every resident.